



Dear Steele (Love Letters 6)

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Category: Romance, War

Description: Revenge by Love.

Dear Steele,

For so long, I've wanted to bare my secrets.

Tell you of my longings.

But her hatred will keep us apart.

Dear Ava,

I waited for you, for years.

Now you're finally ready.

Nothing will stop me from making you mine.

Total Pages (Source): 10

Page 1

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 4:29 am

Chapter 1

Ava

Dear Steele,

I feel like I've known you my entire life, and it shouldn't be shocking that I feel the way I do. I'm sure to you it would be, though. I know Heather would be pissed if she ever found out I've been in love with you for so long.

Some days, I don't even feel like we're friends anymore. We just go through the motions, I guess. I'm not even sure I'm sad about it; I know she uses me.

I'm sorry... that's your sister. I shouldn't complain. At least I'm not alone when I'm at school. She lets me sit with her friends instead of by myself.

High school sucks. I remember watching you when we were younger. You were always so outgoing; people gravitated towards you like a beacon of light. I think that's one reason I fell so deeply in love with you. You never once treated anyone with anything but respect. I never felt like an outsider with you around.

I'm not sure when it happened, but over the past two years, I've gradually grown to love you. I'm sure my presence is not even a blip on your radar, but I always tried my best to be around when you were on leave. You've become such an exceptional man, and I'm already jealous of the woman who will one day steal your heart.

I used to pay close attention to you when you came home. The way you moved was

always with purpose. When your parents threw that huge pool party, I spent almost half the time faking sickness so I could watch you from the upstairs bathroom without being caught. Admiring as the water trickled down your firm muscles every time you left the pool filled my dreams for months. The way your skin would ripple with each stroke of your arms in the water never fails to make me shiver when I think about it.

I miss you, Steele, so much. Things have gotten tense at home with my parents' impending divorce, and neither want to leave the house behind. I'm 18, so I don't think they care too much about what happens with me. With graduation in just a few weeks and my acceptance to Berkeley, I don't have time to ponder whether they do or not. I just want out of here.

I wish I could send you this letter. I wish I could confess my love for you face to face. I wish for so many things that will never be.

Always yours,

Ava

Folding the letter I know I'll never send but pull out often to read since writing it two weeks ago, I startle when Heather leans over my shoulder. "What's that?" she asks.

"Jesus, Heather," I rush out, holding my filled hand to my heart. "Can't you knock?" There's a party tonight, and for some reason, she's invited me.

"So what is it?" She never can let anything go.

Stuffing the paper in my underwear drawer, I reply, "Nothing important. Let's go."

I shouldn't have left the room first. I would have seen her go back for it. I would have found out her hatred for me was complete.

I just shouldn't have left first...

Chapter 2

Steele

It's been almost three weeks since I received Ava's letter confessing her love for me, only I'm almost certain she wasn't the sender. She's right about Heather using her, though. My little sister went from funny and sweet to vindictive and cold-hearted overnight a couple of years back.

I don't know how it happened or when, hell, even why. She was suddenly just filled with all this hate towards anyone close to her. Especially Ava.

I often wonder if she knows Heather sent it and whether I should write her back. Ava has been reserved since the day we met. She's not extremely outgoing, but man, can she be funny. And quirky. Cute as hell too.

Until I received her letter, I don't think I thought of her that way, but now, looking back, there was always this connection to each other. I speculate on what it would be like to have her at home waiting for me. What her lips would taste like the first time I kiss her. Will she grip my biceps as our tongues duel, or will she wrap her arms around my back to pull me closer? Does she like being kissed along her neck or does she prefer across her shoulder?

"Jesus, Lieutenant, when are you going to write her back?" My friend Garth, and fellow bunkmate, asks over my shoulder.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 4:29 am

“I don’t know if I should,” I respond.

“This your sister’s cute friend?” he asks, and my gaze flips from the letter to the man, wondering how the hell he knows. “Steele, you’ve been talking about her since we arrived back here, six months ago.”

Shit. “I have?” How the hell did I not notice that?

“Yup, and isn’t that her picture under the pillow on your bunk?” Damn.

Leaning back in my chair, I try to recall all the times I’ve spoken about Ava, and he’s right, I do talk about her. A lot.

Standing, I stride to my bunk and pull out the picture. The edges are frayed, and the color has faded. Because every damn night, I’m looking at it.

Goddamn. He’s right.

I suppose I have my answer now.

I’m writing Ava back.

What the hell do I say?

Rummaging through my trunk, I find the pictures our unit took last month and pull a couple out. It’s been a long fucking time since I’ve seen Ava in the flesh, and now that I’m romantically thinking about her, I want to make sure I’m clear about my

interest.

Pictures will hopefully help.

I include one of my entire unit, one of me and our K-9, and two of me: one shooting at target practice and the other without a shirt, playing a game of basketball.

Shoving the images in the envelope, I stare blankly at the piece of paper, wondering what the fuck I'm supposed to write.

Chapter 3

Ava

Searching through my bag for my keys, I curse myself for taking the extra shift at the coffee shop. It's dark, cold, and I can smell the rain yearning to fall. But I need the money. Since my parents' divorce, Mom has been travelling like crazy after selling my childhood home, and Dad has a new girlfriend who's pregnant.

Sure, college is paid for, my dorm is paid for. Everything is paid for. But I'm left alone, with no family. I work, I study, I go to school. My friends are few and far between.

Heather laughed when I confronted her about my letter to Steele when I realized it was missing the next day. After insulting me about how pathetic I was and telling me what a loser she thought me to be, she then confessed to mailing it. I haven't spoken to her

since then.

When I moved on campus, I made sure to have all my mail forwarded to the dorms,

just in case Steele wrote me back. But it's been a few months, and I haven't heard anything from the man. I struggle daily between crushing disappointment, embarrassment, and heartache.

Finally getting the building door open, I slip inside just as the rain lets loose. Unlocking my mailbox, I have junk, bills, and flyers. Exciting, not. The building is quiet and eerie as I climb the three flights to my dorm room. I'm not normally out this late.

Entering my room, which is more like a small apartment because I am fortunate that my dad is loaded, so he made sure I had my own space, at least, before ditching me for the new family. After dropping my mail and keys on the small entrance table, one envelope slips to the ground, and as I close the door with my hip and lean down to pick it up at the same time, I nearly fall on my ass when I see the return address.

Steele wrote me back.

Staggering, I drop onto the couch and stare at the envelope before opening it. A minute ago, I was dead tired; now, I'm wide awake.

Dear Ava,

I realize I wasn't supposed to see your letter. And you're likely pissed at Heather for sending it because, let's face it, we both know she did, but I'm not disappointed.

In fact, I'm the exact opposite.

If you hadn't written it, if she hadn't sent it, I wouldn't have been forced to examine how I felt about you. And, babe, there are some genuine feelings there.

Do you remember the end of the year party Heather threw last summer? You hid in

the pool house nearly the entire time, hating that Heath was forcing you to wear that hideous black and green polka dot bikini. Christ, you hated that thing.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 4:29 am

I remember walking in, your back was to me, and you were muttering under your breath. I had no idea it was you those first few seconds, but I remember thinking, “Damn, a girl brave enough to wear this tacky thing has my full attention,” and you did. Not just that day, either, but every day after too.

I’m a fool for not making the first move, then maybe your letter wouldn’t be filled with so much doubt and heartache. I never want to be the reason for your pain, Ava. I want to make you smile, to make you look forward to waking up each day. But mostly, right now, I want to make you fucking sigh my name every goddamn night.

I hope to hear back from you real soon.

Yours,

Steele

Whoa.

Like holy whoa.

I guess I never truly anticipated him responding, but for him to share my feelings? That’s a whole other realm. Excitement rushes through my veins as I hold the letter to my chest.

He likes me.

He cares.

Steele could be mine.

Chapter 4

Steele

Since mailing my letter back to Ava, I've watched the postal truck come and go a dozen times. We never know how long it will take for mail to come, and as disappointing as that is, it makes the arrival that much sweeter. Yeah, we could Skype, and eventually, I hope we'll get to that, but for now, I get the feeling that Ava prefers putting pen to paper. It's less pressure.

"Package, Lieutenant." Taking the box, I'm surprised to see Ava's name with a different mailing address on it.

Sitting behind my desk, I cut through the tape and flip open the sides. Tins of baked goods rest on top, and when I get to the bottom, there's the fucking swimsuit. In all it's terrible polka dot glory with a note pinned to it. "Since you like it so much, consider it yours." I howl with amusement as I drape it across the edge of my desk. It definitely looked better on her.

Another envelope at the very bottom catches my eye; I open it up and remove the letter and pictures she sent along with it. Most are selfies of her being silly. Drinking coffee, reading, lying in bed. But the one that makes me pause is the one of her and I laughing at that damn party. I can see it now, the attraction we share. The attention other boys were giving her, but she only had eyes for me that day.

Dear Steele,

There was never a time when I imagined you could possibly return my feelings, though I hoped for that greatly. I had to read your letter fifty times before the words

truly sunk in. And even now, I'm not sure they have.

I've crushed on you for so long that I figured I'd grow out of it when I came to college. I'd meet some cute boy, forget about you, and move on. I'd fall in love, he'd ask me to marry him, we'd have babies and live happily ever after.

I was asked out three times after arriving at school by well-meaning sophomores, but none of them hold a candle to you. I was never attracted. Didn't get butterflies in my belly. That silly way you make me lightheaded and feel on top of the world didn't happen either.

All I could think about was you.

But you never wrote back.

Honestly, I didn't think you would. I mean, why should you? I was your little sister's most hated friend. Why would you give me a second glance?

Then your letter came.

Now, I feel like I'm floating on cloud nine.

Is that weird? It should be.

I don't even know if we'll click once you come back home. Heck, I'm not even home anymore, and I have no plans to return.

My parents have moved on, Heather hates me, and I was never close friends with anyone else. I have nothing to go back there for.

So, I guess what I'm wondering is, how can we possibly work?

Page 4

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 4:29 am

Sorry to be so heavy-handed. We've known each other for years, yet now that our feelings are in the open, I feel like we're complete strangers. I don't know anything about what you want in the future. I don't even know what I want.

Do you want marriage and babies? Are you in the Navy for life? What do you see your future looking like?

It's way too late for these thoughts. Maybe I should go to bed.

Enjoy your goodies.

Night,

Ava

Scratching my head, I'm not entirely sure what to think of her ramblings, but I know exactly what my future holds, and she's a part of it.

Chapter 5

Ava

Dear Ava,

Anyone ever tell you that you overthink things? Because you are.

How about we start simple. Pretend like we're complete strangers and go from there.

Might help take the pressure off.

Hey! I'm Steele Carter, 29 years old from Los Angeles, California. Currently, a Naval lieutenant based out of San Francisco. I'm a Navy man for life. Joined the day I turned 18 and haven't looked back. I plan to remain in Intelligence for as long as I'm able.

I aspire to have a family. Wife, as many children as she'll give me, dog, white picket fence. I want it all, and I won't stop until I get everything I desire.

What else?

I have a sister who is kind of a witch and turned on her best friend after finding out the boy she was crushing on was interested in the other girl. Now, when I say turned into a witch, I mean she went full-on The Craft witch darkness. Even though the other girl had no idea about the boy. Not excusing the behavior, but at least we know the reason.

I just received word that I'll be getting some leave soon, and who knows, maybe by the time my next letter is due to you, I'll be there instead.

Tell me everything you want, Ava, even the little things.

Steele

Blowing out a deep breath, I reread his letter. He didn't run; I thought he would. I thought maybe he'd feel pressured into returning my feelings or have to pretend to, and I wanted to give him an out with all my heavy talk.

It didn't work.

Instead, he reciprocated every sentiment I expressed and so much more. He shared with me his dreams that match my own; in fact, he revealed far more than I imagined he would.

Learning about Heather eases some of my misery. For a long time, I struggled with her rejection. All the hurt she brought me and never understanding why was awful.

Staring at the bo

oks on my desk, I debate whether to write him back right now or finish studying; it's a no-brainer. Steele holds far more of my attention than the anatomy books that overwhelm me.

Taking another gulp of my coffee, I begin writing. Responding to him about everything he's asked of me and what I think of everything he's said.

I even get brave enough to ask him to Skype with me when we can make the time work. I have no idea where he is, only that my letter has to be rerouted from his base to get to him.

I'm giddy as I sign the letter and slip it into an envelope. I'm still so young, yet I've always felt much older, which makes me feel silly because the worst thing to happen to me is my parents divorcing. But then I remember how often I was left on my own to raise myself.

With a sigh, my thoughts circle the drain as I avoid studying. Becoming a teacher has been a life-long goal, but I can't seem to focus for longer than a class.

Flopping back on my bed, I imagine a future where Steele and I work out. One where we have children and get our happy ending. We're a family. A real one, too, not one like mine where it was all for show.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 4:30 am

Closing my eyes, I see it clearly. A little boy and a little girl, looking just like Steele, a sweet golden retriever, and a cute little cat. White picket fence and all.

It's what I want. What I crave.

Chapter 6

Steele

“Yo! That was brutal, Lieutenant.” Garth bitches next to me as we play a game of basketball. Our unit has a few days of R&R before we begin an intelligence-gathering mission with a team of SEALs.

“Ain't my fault you can't play for shit.”

“You got the height, though,” he grumbles as we walk to the bench and grab some water. Wiping down my face and chest, I guzzle half a bottle and notice the mail truck arriving. “You got mail on there?” he asks with a smirk. Likely knowing I'm anticipating another letter from Ava.

I shrug and stride back to my tent, trying to keep my steps light.

It's a full hour before I have any mail delivered, and I'm getting antsy. As soon as I'm handed the box, I barely wait for the guy to leave before I'm tearing into it.

More treats, more pictures. Fuck, is Ava's smile addicting. Pinning the images to the board behind my desk, I drop into the chair and open the letter.

Dear Steele,

Alright, complete strangers, it is.

Hi! My name is Ava Fischer. I'm 19, and I attend UC Berkeley as an English major. I aspire to become a teacher after graduation. I love long walks under a clear night sky, swimming, and basketball. I'm known to go hiking once in a while but avoid it if I can.

I adore reading true crime novels and recently finished a chilling version of Jack the Ripper and the conspiracies on his true identity. Oddly enough, I've heard more than once that some people think Jack and the Zodiac Killer could be related, and if that's not terrifying, then I don't know what is.

So I guess that went a little deeper than I meant to.

I'm not a serial killer in the making, I swear. They fascinate me, though. There is so much to learn about why a person can kill with no remorse and continue to do so. Are they made that way, or are they born that way?

I just got even creepier, didn't I? Sorry. Not intended.

Like you, I dream of a family one day. Husband, children, animals, nice house. I have dreams of that quintessential family life.

I think we could be incredible together, Steele, and if you're interested, maybe we could Skype? I love writing to you, but I hate the wait in between. I guess there's always email, though?

My Skype info is on the back if you want to.

Talk to you soon.

Love,

Ava

Booting up my computer, I don't even think about the time difference and immediately call Ava on my secure line. She gave me the go-ahead, and I have zero desire to wait to see her.

It rings three times before she answers.

"Didn't scare you off then?" She yawns as a light turns on.

"Shit. What time is it there?" Doing the calculations in my head, I wince. "Sorry, Ava, go back to sleep." Fuck, I'm an ass.

"No, Steele, it's fine." My dick jumps at hearing her say my name. "I don't have any classes in the morning. I don't mind staying up to talk to you." Her sleepy smile makes me wish I could kiss her.

"You sure? You can call me back later," I offer while hoping she says she'll stay.

"Positive." I watch as she sits up in bed and puts the laptop on her legs. "Have you tried the cookies yet?" she asks with a grin.

Page 6

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 4:30 am

“Cookies?” I didn’t even look at what she sent.

Her giggle cheers up the room. “Yes, Steele. Peanut butter chocolate chip cookies, banana bread with almonds, carrot muffins, and chocolate croissants. All made from scratch.”

“You trying to make me fat?” I grin as I dig through the box, finding the muffins. Pulling one out of the sealed bag, I take a big bite and moan at the flavor. “Damn, girl. These are good.”

“Yeah?” I nod at her uncertainty. “Good. I was worried they might dry out. What else do you like? I can send more things.”

“You,” I mutter around another bite, leaning back in my seat. Her shocked face is, precisely, what I wanted. “Would it be too forward of me to ask what you’re wearing?”

Her eyes widen as she looks from me to down at the blanket covering her chest. “Probably.” Even through the screen, I can hear the heat in her tone.

Leaning forward, I allow my eyes to wander down what I can see of her body. “I’m asking anyways.” I was kidding at first, wanting to tease her. But now, I’m dying to see what she’s got on. I have a feeling she could make a paper bag sexy.

Twisting her lips from side to side, Ava nods her head, and I sit closer. “But you should know, I’m not wearing this because I thought you were going to call.” Standing up with the blanket pressed to her chest, she places her laptop on a solid

surface, and once I can see her full length, she drops the blanket to the ground.

I think I've died and gone to heaven.

Chapter 7

Ava

For the past three weeks, Steele and I have video chatted at least three times a week, and I've realized what I felt for him before was still a schoolgirl's crush. It had to be. Because the emotions I'm experiencing now are way more intense. More poignant.

I miss him. Ache for him on a soul-deep level. I worry late into the night until I pass out from exhaustion, and what makes everything so much worse is that I'm terrified to say the words I didn't understand were true until we connected.

At the end of every call, I want to say I love you. I want him to know. But I chicken out at the last second, and then it's too late; he's gone, and I'm left disappointed in myself for not having the guts to speak truth to what I feel.

Shaking my head, I need to concentrate on what my professor is saying before I daydream myself right out of school. I record each class so that I can relisten should I miss something even though I'm taking notes. It's helped a lot the last couple of weeks.

There are hundreds of students in this class, so I don't think anything of it when the door opens. Not even when I see the military uniform, dark, close-cropped hair I've been dreaming about, or the bouquet of flowers.

It's not until my name is called that I look at the face of the newcomer and nearly melt in my chair.

“Steele.” I whisper his name, afraid if I say it too loud, he’ll disappear on me.

“Ava.” I nearly liquefy at the way he says my name. So much emotion in the sound. Standing, I push my way through the middle of the aisle I’m sitting in and rush down the stairs, my body in complete control as I jump into his arms.

I don’t hesitate to kiss him, lay my lips across his and devour his mouth. His hands on my ass flex and squeeze as he takes control of the moment, only pulling away at the hooting and hollering from the class behind us.

“I have to go,” I tell my professor, who nods, understanding. The girl who sits next to me brings me my bag and sweater, and Steele carries me out of class.

We don’t get far. Dropping me to my feet, Steele pins me against the nearest wall and continues where we left off. Without an audience this time.

“Goddamn, am I glad to see you,” he mumbles as our lips clash. Tongues tangle, and my heart beats so hard, I think it might thunder right out of my chest.

“Yeah? I didn’t know you were coming. I thought you would have gone home.” Biting my lip, I don’t want to hear that he’s leaving me again.

“My parents wanted me to.” I’m not starting off on the right foot with them. “But I told them about you and how we haven’t done more than talk. That I needed to be here, to feel you, kiss you, hold you in my arms. I told them I had to fucking know.”

“Know what?” I gasp.

“If what I was feeling for you was because of distance or because I really do fucking love you.” Peace washes over me at his words.

“And? Do you know now?”

“Ava, baby, I knew a long fucking time ago. I love you, and there isn’t a damn thing that could stop me from being with you.” He leans down to capture my lips, slower this time. He savors the moment, pulling me closer by the hips.

“My apartment is only a few minute

Page 7

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 4:30 am

s from here,” I mumble. I’ve dreamt of being with him every night since I got his first letter months ago.

“I have five days here,” he tells me, and I try not to let the sadness show. “Don’t look at me like that, baby. I don’t want to make you sad.”

“I’m not.” That’s a lie. “It’s just not long enough,” I whisper.

“Not yet it’s not. But soon.” Gripping his hand, I pull him behind me as we quickly walk back to my apartment.

Entering the building, it’s quiet, and that only compounds the anticipation building between us. As soon as the door is open, Steele slams it shut behind us, locking it. Standing in the middle of the room, I feel a little daunted now. He, however, has no qualms.

Stalking towards me as he sheds his uniform, only getting to his pants as he reaches me, Steele doesn’t hesitate to pull me into him. Kissing my doubt away and pulling my shirt over my head.

I didn’t wear a bra today, and the appreciative look in his eyes excites me. Pushing his tongue past my startled response as he hoists me up into his hold, a bruising grip on my ass, Steele bends over and drops me on the bed. As he towers over me, his wide muscled frame envelopes me, making me feel loved, cherished, protected against all the terrible things in the world.

His hands skim down my body, and he drops his head to my chest, lost in the

sensations as he whispers my name. Dragging my pants off my hips, I hear his zipper lowering and the heat of his body between my thighs. “It’s gonna be quick this first time, Ava. I’ve been dreaming of being with you for too damn long to last.” He sounds tortured.

Shivering from the hungry look in his gaze, I can only nod, craving to feel him inside my body. Rocking as one, silence surrounds us, and every breathy moan from me, every shocked gasp, his guttural groans, they are all amplified.

Squirming as I feel the heat of his cock sliding through my folds, I’m over-heated and needy. “Touching you is pure heaven,” Steele groans into my neck, wrapping his arms under my back and holding me close.

When finally, I feel him prodding to enter my body, I relax as best I can and bite along his shoulder as he finally slides home, his girth slightly painful.

“Fuck, Ava.” He kisses along my neck as his hips move gingerly, igniting a hedonistic pleasure I can’t define.

“More, Steele. Harder,” I hiss, lifting my hips to meet each of his thrusts.

Rolling us over, I’m settled on top, and the muscles in his neck are so strained it looks painful. I don’t hesitate to roll my hips up and down, back and forth, languidly rocking before picking up pace as his fingers continue to sink into my hips.

As soon as I’ve got a smooth rhythm going, Steele rolls us over again and takes command, his thrusting erratic and painful in all the best ways. As my orgasm begins to take over and my body convulses, I feel him hit the edge simultaneously, and we cross the finish line together. Out of breath, satiated, and completely exhausted.

“I love you, Steele.” The words come so effortlessly, so freely, for once. I pray this is

just the beginning for us.

Chapter 8

Steele

“Would you fucking listen to me, Heather.” I’ve finally snapped. My sister has been a complete bitch about Ava and me with literally no reason for it at all.

“No! She took the boy I liked, and now she’s taking you. You didn’t even come home because of her.” The whine in her voice grates on my nerves. Of all my siblings, me being the oldest, she the youngest, we were always closest, but she’s getting on my last nerve now.

“Did you even hear a fucking word I said?” I shout. “I had five days; I chose to be with her. Ava thought I was going home. She and I are together now. She’s mine, and when I come home again, I’m going to ask her to marry me. She will be your fucking sister, and you’ll damn well treat her better than the ones we have now.”

Her arms cross angrily. “No.”

“Are you a damn child or an adult, Heath? Because I’m thinking you’re about two years old right now. Ava was your best friend for years; she didn’t even know the boy was interested in her. They never once spoke, and when I told her why you suddenly turned cold, she felt terrible. It wasn’t her fucking fault, Heather!” If I were at home right now, I’d be shaking some sense into my stubborn-ass sibling.

I recognize in the softening of her eyes and the loosening of her shoulders that I’m getting to her. “I need you to be friends with Ava again. I’m so stupidly in love with her that it will physically hurt me if you hate her.” I’m not above guilt-tripping my sister into forgiveness either.

Uncrossing her arms, she blows the hair out of her face before reluctantly agreeing. “Fine. It was exhausting trying to hate her anyways. All the other girls in school were always so bitchy, and Ava was incredibly nice. I wish I could take back how I’ve acted.” Now, her vulnerability is showing.

“So do it, Heath. I know Ava will be happy to have you as a friend again. Call her.” Noticing the mail truck, I know I have a package of goodies on there from Ava. “I’ve gotta go. I’ll call you again next week. Love you, kid.” She waves as I hit “end call”, and the mailman arrives, handing me the package.

As I open the box, her letter is right on top this time. After I told her it was the first thing I went looking for, she promised to make it easier for me.

Dear Steele,

I miss you. Body-aching, heart-cramping, belly-twisting miss you. It’s only been a couple weeks since you left, and it feels like years. Five days wasn’t nearly long enough, but I treasure every moment we had together.

I go to class, I come home, I study. I’m just going through the motions. I never imagined I could miss you this much. The shirt you left behind helps. Having your scent with me, wrapped around me as I sleep, makes it easier.

Page 8

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 4:30 am

I'm selfish in my desire to have you by my side at every moment and in my bed every night, but I'm so proud of you. The work you do. The people you help. And it's that knowledge that keeps me from begging you to come home. To quit.

I look forward to our next call.

I love you.

Ava

Damn. My girl sure knows how to make a guy feel loved. I have four months left on my tour, and I intend on permanently making her mine as soon as I can upon my arrival. I just hope by then, she and Heather have become friends again.

Chapter 9

Ava

Dear Ava,

You keep me sane. The thought of you at home, waiting for me, keeps me from going nuts while I'm here. Things have been quiet, so it's easy to get lost in what's happening back home. Right now, all I can think about is the moment I can hold you in my arms again.

Whisper my love in your ear.

Indulge on your pleasure until the sun rises.

Hear you moan my name until you're breathless.

I fucking miss you, Ava.

More than I've ever missed anyone in my life. The anticipation of tasting your lips is what wakes me up every morning. Even with the video calls, I can't wait to touch your soft skin. Make love to your mind and body.

I never imagined a life where I could fall in love with my soulmate through a letter, but we did it. Even if the feelings were there before, I was blind. I know you were embarrassed, even angry at Heather for sending that first letter, but I couldn't be more grateful because we nearly missed our chance.

I'll see you soon.

Love always,

Steele

Sighing as I reread his letter, we haven't been able to video chat as much the last two weeks because of finals, but that only makes this letter so much more special.

"I did it on purpose, you know." I gaze up at Heather sitting in the chair at my desk as I sit cross-legged on my bed and see the guilt in her cheeks. "Even though I was mad at you, I knew you two were meant for each other. I could see it every time you guys were in the same room."

"You could?" I thought I kept it to myself pretty well.

“A blind person could, Ava.” She grin

s. “I don’t know why I was so bloody mad at you over stupid Jeremy Edwards. He was an asshole. But I saw you reading that letter that day, and I glimpsed the word love when you tried to hide it from me. I might have been mad at you, but Steele is the best person I know. He deserves happiness.”

When Heather showed up to apologize a few weeks ago, I was skeptical, hesitant even, but I’ve known her long enough to recognize when she’s sincere. Since then, she’s been up twice more. We’ve grown in our friendship, and I’m grateful to have her back in my life.

Chewing the corner of my lip, I debate sharing my secret with her. My excitement bubbles over, however, and I spill. “I’m pregnant,” I blurt out, and her eyes widen to the size of small saucers.

“Noooo!” A huge grin overtakes her face. “Seriously?” I nod. “Oh my gosh!” Standing, she tackle-hugs me to the bed. “I’m going to be an aunt!” Her squeal of excitement is all I need to breathe a sigh of relief and release my sense of excitement.

“How are you going to tell him?” Heather finally asks when we can breathe again, and I have no clue.

But she has the perfect idea.

Epilogue

Steele

Page 9

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 4:30 am

Four Years Later.

“Hush, little baby, don’t you cry...” Listening to Ava sing to our youngest, a little girl, as she rocks her back to sleep makes me homesick. I know I’m watching the footage hours later, after the babies have been put down and fed two more times, but it doesn’t make it any less important.

With the birth of our son, we decided to have cameras installed in the house that I could access from any secure connection in the world and watch our children grow up. Missing Maddox’s first steps nearly killed me, and now I’ll never miss anything again.

Many people have tried to convince Ava that I’m controlling because of them, but she shuts them down immediately, telling them it was her idea. One she’s insanely proud of, especially after I heard Katelyn’s first word a month ago.

It was music to my ears. Witnessing the tears in Ava’s eyes when she heard it made me miss my family even more and appreciate my wife's sacrifices.

After the vixen told me about her pregnancy with Maddox—through boudoir pictures that apparently were Heather’s idea—she worked her ass off to finish school as quickly as possible. She graduated six months early, found an amazing substitute job at a private school, and has been home for most of the last four years.

With two children now, though, she has quit working for the time being. She’s the back-up sub if they need her, or she helps tutor when requested. Ava is happier than I’ve ever seen her and loves being a mom.

“Mommy’s going to give you a baby sister.” I pause at the words she’s crooning to our daughter and, immediately, mute the video and call her.

“Hello, handsome.” Her grin upon answering as she breastfeeds Katie tells me she knows exactly why I’m calling. “Having a good day?” she asks instead.

“The fucking best. Were you serious?” She always is, but I need to ask for confirmation.

“As a heart attack.” A tear rolls down her cheek.

“I fucking love you, Ava.” Touching the screen, I wish I could dry her tears away.

“Just come home, Steele.” I have yet to be there for either of the births and have missed every ultrasound. Not once has she done anything but encourage me to come home.

A promise I intend to keep.

Epilogue

Ava

Six Months Later.

“I could kill him!” I scream at Heather, who has been my best friend, birthing coach, babysitter, everything I’ve needed since Steele and I got married nearly five years ago.

“You got this, Ava,” she reassures while pulling my legs up higher as I push when the doctor asks. Exhaustion weighs heavily on my body.

Not only am I pregnant with our third child but also our fourth. Twins. We're having twins. Surprise twins even. I had no idea, neither did the doctor, until my latest ultrasound a little over a month ago because I was feeling way more uncomfortable than I had with my other pregnancies.

I haven't told Steele yet. Not because I don't want to but because he has been unreachable. As much as I've hated it, I understand, and his family is always here for me. Even my mother over the last few years. I still barely talk to my father, but that's his choice, sadly, not mine.

"Baby number one is almost here; one more big push," the doctor instructs just as the delivery room door opens.

"Holy shit," Heather mutters.

Looking up, I see my husband in all his sweaty, exhausted, glory. A nurse attempts to push him out of the room, but he growls at her and strides towards me.

"Didn't want to miss this one," he grumbles against my lips.

Before I can respond, a contraction hits, and I'm urged to push. Steele secures one leg, while Heather takes the other, and I feel like I'm going to explode. Relief hits me when I hear the shrilly cry.

"And we have a beautiful boy. Dad, would you like to cut the cord?" Steele beams with pride as he does. The nurse takes our son to the incubator to clean him up, and the doctor tells me to get ready to push again because the second baby is ready to crown.

"Second?" Steele appears shell-shocked as he peers between my legs and notices another head coming through. "Son of a bitch. You really like to surprise me." He

grins as I begin to bear down again. Exhausted and ready to quit, I hear another tiny cry.

“A gorgeous little girl.” The doctor grins, and Steele cuts her cord too.

Waiting for the babies to be evaluated, I gaze over at Heather and realize exactly what our newest daughter’s name will be.

Page 10

Source Creation Date: July 16, 2025, 4:30 am

“Do we have names?” the nurse asks.

I nod. We’ve discussed boy names already. “He is Charlie”—after Steele and Heather’s dad—“and she is Heather.” My friend freezes in place, and I can see the tears welling in her eyes. Steele nods and grins, approving my choice of name.

“I fucking love you, Ava.” He kisses me before he’s handed Charlie.

“Just glad you’re home, Steele,” I murmur as I watch the two people I love most in this world love on the new babies.

Closing my eyes, gratitude and love fills the room, surrounding me with everything I need in this life.

The End!